

## Anisur Rahman Tonu

## Catching up with the music director

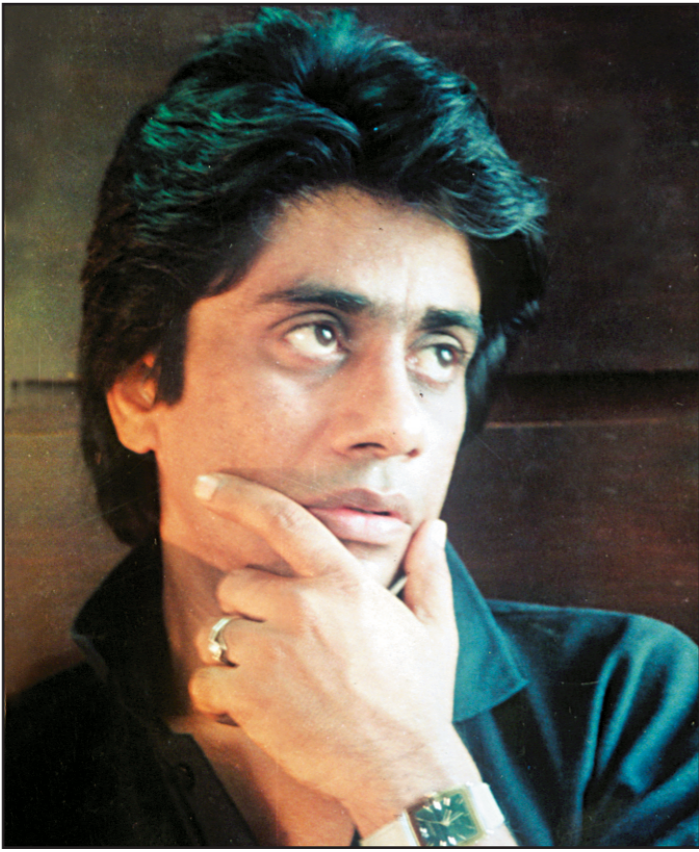
SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

IMAGINE entering BTV's huge auditorium on a cool evening. With the studio lights dimmed the recording session is set to begin to the resonance of a wide variety of musical instruments. At the far end, music director Anisur Rahman Tonu is deeply immersed in composing a melodious number. A group of talented musicians such as Milton on tabla, Feroze on sitar, Yousuff on sarod, Alauddin on violin and Sohel at the keyboard accompany the director.

Occasionally tea boys are seen moving here and there. Artists have already gathered and made themselves comfortable in the red velvet chairs in the hall. With his glasses carefully placed on his nose, Tonu listens to the first few lines of a song and is now working on the notes for the preludes and interludes.

Associated with the media since 1972, Tonu has so far composed innumerable hit songs for the television. *Eyi rupali chand-e*, a duet by Shampa and Tapan, *Tumi shopney asho shopney jao*, sung by Shubir Nandi, *Kannamar bokuermajhey* by Shahnaz Rahmatulla and *Nodir achhey shagor* by Sadya Afreen Mallick, have received wide popularity, says Tonu.

During a short break, I ask him about his involvement with films. Tonu puts the issue in perspective. As he says, "I am more enthusiastic about the enter-educational audiocassettes for children. I have worked in this medium for the last 23 years or more, which is very rewarding. I am closely associated with Tona Tunu, a children's organisation, that has gained immense popularity."



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Reputed artists such as Abdul Hadi, Shampa Reza, Shubir Nandi, Shakila Zafar, Shimul Yousuff, Diba along with several child artists have lent their voice to the numerous cassettes containing nursery rhymes such as Esho guntey shikhi and Chhoraye bornomala for the toddlers. The organisation has so far presented 22 cassettes with colourful books that have captivated the young listeners.

Recalling earlier days, Tonu says, "Managing Director Mahbubur Rahman Joyal, Mujibur Rahman Dilu, Zahur and myself were the

foursome who worked on the project tirelessly with the slogan Shishuder Jonno Amra (taking the children's cause). There were times when we practically went over to the shops and personally talked to the children to get their feedback on the songs.

"The highly innovative project was unique and was meant to be educative through entertainment. Somehow, with time, newer ideas cropped up within the group, gradually detracting from the original plan."

As the recording session begins,

Tonu takes up his position at the control room, paying attention to minute details. "Any professional training that you underwent?" I ask. "Not really," he goes on. "Music runs in my family. For my part, I loved to strum the guitar and play the keyboard every now and then. I breathe, drink and dream music.

"It was during the early 70s, when I frequented the jamming sessions of pop stars Azam Khan, Feroze Shai and their group. This enabled me to further hone my skills. It was sometime during 1972 when senior producer, Sakina Sarwar offered me a chance to direct music for a children's programme. Later, eminent music director Jalal Ahmed advised me to take it up as a career. Several other musicians have been involved with the media for years together, but don't have a knack for direction. It is something that develops from within."

"Would you advise the newcomers to follow in your footsteps?" I enquire. "Why not? With several private channels hitting the road it is an opportune moment to grab the offer. New entrants are lining up to try their luck in the glamour world. But the alarming thing is that the number of acoustic musicians is declining by the day. The entire music industry now has only one sarod player -- Yousuff. There will soon come a day when our future generation might have to visit the Western museums to know what *sharinda, khol* or other *deshi* instruments looked like.

"The big firms or the multinational organisations have stepped in to nurture the budding vocal artists. Why not promote the instrumentalists likewise -- and enliven the music scene for the coming years?" asks Tonu.

## Mollah Barir Bou: A breath of fresh air?

KARIM WAHEED

Since the megahit *Moner Majhey Tumi*, mainstream Bangladeshi films have been going through an extended drought. The recent success of *Mollah Barir Bou*, might just be the rejuvenator our film industry needs. Incidentally, both *Moner Majhey...* and *Mollah...* have been produced by Motiur Rahman Panu. Seems like Panu has the 'Midas touch'. What is it about *Mollah...* that the audience is finding so endearing? Tickets are selling like 'Haji's biriyani' at Star Cineplex and Madhumita. The crowds outside the theatres obviously indicate the movie going the golden way, like a certain *Beder Meye Josna* did years ago.

*Mollah...* deals with the rural life, its simplicities, naïveté, demons of ignorance, superstitions and the perpetual desire of men to dominate women. Sounds like an impressive theme but does the movie succeed in conveying its messages?

The movie revolves around Gazi Ebadat Mollah, his son Jowan Gazi who doesn't seem to have grown up from the "daddy's little boy" phase and Jowan's nature-loving eccentric wife, Bokul. Over the years we've seen several characters in movies that are overwhelmed by the splendour of nature but this is perhaps the first time that a character has been labeled specifically as "nature-lover" in a Bangladeshi movie.

Mollah owns a vast property (about 200 bigha) and is an influential figure in the village. Jowan, sporting a hideously fake-looking wig and moustache works on his father's lands and occasionally snitches to Mollah about his wife's weirdness. The weirdness, according to both Mollah and Jowan is Bokul being mesmerised by moonlight and the cooing of cuckoos.



Bokul wanders around the village, prances around trees and takes dips in the pond. As a result of her 'extra-curricular' activities Bokul has a miscarriage. Mollah is infuriated. That means little to Bokul who goes about her old ways as soon as she recovers. Bokul becomes pregnant again and again she loses the unborn child. This time Mollah just doesn't forgive her. He declares Bokul is possessed by some evil spirit and asks the *Ojha* (witch doctor) to perform an exorcism on her. Bokul is publicly abused and humiliated in the name of 'getting rid of bad spirits'. She is devastated and vows never to go out of the house again.

Meanwhile, Mollah wants a successor and picks the 'gossip queen' Parul to be his son's second wife. Although Parul is just a housemaid, that doesn't become an issue as Mollah just wants a beautiful daughter-in-law. Unlike Bokul, Parul is cunning and she

soon manages to give Mollah a taste of his own medicine. She convinces everyone that her father-in-law is possessed and calls in the *Ojha* to treat Mollah to the infamous *banshdola* (beating with a bamboo shaft). Hell, she even manages to give her husband a make-over.

All is not well though. Mollah cannot tolerate Parul messing up his domain and decides to get rid of her once and for all. Just when he is about to strike Parul in her sleep, Bokul smites him from behind. An altruistic Parul decides to take the blame for the murder and goes to prison, leaving Bokul and Jowan to live happily ever after.

The movie's script has been written by veteran actor ATM Shamsuzzaman who also plays the role of Mollah. Sophisticated movie buffs may not enjoy the movie but a mainstream movie's success relies on the masses, not a handful of persnickety movie critics. The director Salahuddin Lavlu, who's

previous endeavour was the hugely popular TV serial *Ronger Manush*, seems to be an expert on comedy in village-life. Emon Shaha's music is ok, nothing to rave about.

ATM Shamsuzzaman as Mollah is as usual superb. The surprise factor of the movie however, is Shabnoor. Who knew the actress has impeccable comic timing? Riaz as Jowan does a reasonable job, considering he didn't have much to do. Moushumi as the eccentric Bokul seems credible. Specifically, the scene where Bokul has a miscarriage in the pond is gripping. Powerful actor Keramat Mowla as the *Ojha* creates sparks in his brief role. Chitrakha Guho as the *Baishnabi* is in the movie just to validate two folk numbers by Momotaz.

The verdict: the movie excels in delivering positive social messages and should be regarded as a breath of fresh air amidst the current barrage of vulgar movies.

## BACHSHASH Awards declared

In recognition of media talent



(L) Firoyza Begum receiving the crest from Minister of Law and Parliamentary Affairs Barrister Maudud Ahmed, (R) Bibi Russell with her crest.

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

The 33rd Bangladesh Cine Journalists Award, popularly known as BACHSHASH Award, was announced recently at the Ballroom of the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel. The lifetime achievement award, titled Obaydul Haque, went to the legendary Nazrul exponent Firoyza Begum. She received the crest from Minister of Law and

Parliamentary Affairs Barrister Maudud Ahmed.

About 80 cultural performers and behind-the-scene artists got awards for their special contribution to their respective fields, including film, TV, music, theatre, dance and fashion. The awardees are M Samad for film (post-humous), Mahfuz Siddiqui and Abdur Rahman for cine journalism, Monwar

Ahmed for photo journalism, Mumtazuddin Ahmed for TV plays, Syed Abdul Hadi in music, M Hamid in theatre, Selina Hosain in literature, Hashem Khan in painting, Kazi Salahuddin Turja in sports, Haji Abul Bashir for social welfare work and Bibi Russell in fashion category.

The best film award went to *Joyjatra*, while the best director award was bagged by Morshedul Islam for *Duratta*. Rabeya Khatun also fared well with the best scriptwriter award for *Megher Porey Megh*.

In the sphere of music, the best

singer award went to Agun and Kanak Champa for *Uttarer Khep* and *Jata Prem Tata Jala* respectively. Another award went posthumously to Rafiqul Bari Chowdhury for the best cinematographer award for *Joyjatra*.

The award giving ceremony was followed by a cultural programme. Among others, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Muhammad Nasiruddin, chairman Rafiquzzaman and secretary general Enamur Reza Deepu along with other jurors of the organisation were also present on the occasion.



(L) Kazi Salahuddin Turja and Kanak Champa with their crests

## Julie Andrews

## The all time favourite singer actress

Who doesn't remember the singing governess of *The Sound of Music*, the cheerful and well loved child minder in *Mary Poppins* and the beautiful Gunievère in *Camelot*? Yes, you've got it right -- we are talking of the elegant and talented Julie Andrews. This actress and singer has made waves all over the world and her charm has scarcely diminished with the years.

Born Julia Elizabeth Wells in Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, England on October 1, 1935, she was discovered as a child to have a superb four-octave singing voice. Her mother and stepfather,



both vaudeville performers, immediately encouraged her to take on a singing career. The immensely popular Julie performed in music halls throughout her childhood and teens, always being immensely popular. At age 20, she performed in a London Palladium production of *Cinderella*, launching her stage career.

She came to Broadway in 1954 with *The Boyfriend*. In 1956 she gave a successful performance as Eliza Doolittle in the unprecedented hit *My Fair Lady*. Her star status continued in 1957, when she starred in the hit TV-production of *Cinderella* (1957) (TV) and through 1960, when she played Gunievère in *Camelot*. She also starred in many TV-specials.

In 1963, Walt Disney approached her with an offer to star in his upcoming production, a lavish musical fantasy that combined live-action and animation. Julie said she would do it if she did not get to play Eliza in the forthcoming film production of *My Fair Lady* (1964). As it happened she didn't bag the prized role and opted to make an auspicious film debut in Disney's *Mary Poppins* (1964), a huge hit which got her the Academy Award for Best Actress. (Incidentally, Audrey Hepburn, who played Eliza in the film *My Fair Lady*, wasn't even nominated.)

Then followed *The Sound of Music* (1965), the highest-grossing movie of its day and one of the highest-grossing of all time. However, there was a hitch in her career: the audiences identified her only with singing, sugary-sweet nannies and governesses. They could not accept her in

dramatic roles such as in *The Americanisation of Emily* (1964), or the Hitchcock thriller *Turn of Mind* (1966). However, the musicals Julie subsequently made did not fare well at the box offices -- be it *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967), *Star!* (1968), or *Darling Lili* (1970) all bombed at the box office.

Fortunately, Julie did not let this keep her down. She took up work in nightclubs and hosted a TV variety series in the 1970s. Later she returned to film with an appearance in *10* (1979), directed by husband Blake Edwards. He helped her climb steadily up the career graph with films such as *S.O.B.* (1981) and the woman playing a man playing a woman in *Victor/Victoria* (1982). Other films of this period were *The Tamarind Seed* (1974), *The Man who Loved Women* (1983), *Duet and That's Life* (both in 1986).

She continued on her acting career through the 1980s and 1990s in movies and TV, hosting several specials and starring in a short-lived sitcom. In 1995, she made a successful return to Broadway to star in the musical version of *Victor/Victoria*.

Unfortunately, an operation on her vocal chords left her singing voice badly damaged in 1998. The courageous Julie continued with her career: giving a show-stopping appearance at the 1999 Tony Awards and appearing in the TV-movie *One Special Night* (1999). Julie Andrews, in all her versatility, will no doubt keep us very entertained for years to come.

Compiled by Cultural Correspondent

## BUZZ

## Habib lends a hand to Shah Abdul Karim

Most of the songs in the two popular albums of renowned musician Habib, *Krishna* and *Maya*, are originally rendered by legendary Baul singer Shah Abdul Karim. The songs, improvised with different musical backups, attract not only youngsters but also music lovers of all ages. Recently Habib along with the singer of *Maya*, Helal, lyricist Anurup Aich and popular singer Ferdous Waheed went to the Ujandhal village of Shunamganj to meet the ailing singer.

Habib donated a substantial amount to the veteran artist for his treatment. He said, "Shah Abdul Karim is an invaluable asset for us. I consider him the living legend of our musical arena. We should all come forward to ensure his recovery and contribute to his medical expenses."

An emotional Karim rendered his famous song *Maya* for Habib. Though his advanced years prevent him from singing in public, he remains optimistic. As he says, "These youngsters are taking my songs to a large number of listeners."



Habib (R) seen with Shah Abdul Karim (2nd R) and others

## Rangila Nagar: A new mega-serial



Diti

Director Shamim Ahmed offers yet another mega serial, titled *Rangila Nagar*. The script of the serial has been written by Aminur Rahman Mukul, who is the head of the children's theatre group Palakar.

Featuring film actress Diti, Tony Dayes, Tisha, Fazlur Rahman Babu, Ahsanul Haque Minu, Sumaiya Shimu, Bonya Mirza, Momena Chowdhury and Kayes Arzu, the story of the serial revolves around three friends looking for a suitable job. Among the friends are a film director, a cameraman and an assis-



Fazlur Rahman Babu

tant director.

In the course their search for an income, many interesting incidents occur. According to the director of the serial, "The play has a positive approach. Although I try to portray the salient problems of urban life through subtle humour, the serial ends on a note of optimism."

Under the banner of Kohinoor Telemedia, the shooting of the serial will begin soon.

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